

A
LETTER

To the REVEREND

Mr. *Moncrieff*,

MINISTER of the Gospel at *Abernethy*,

IN ANSWER to

HIS LETTER,

Concerning the Secession of the Burghers.

By a Friend at Aberdeen, to whom it was directed.



ABERDEEN :

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LETTER



2 1 R :

I HAVE carefully read your letter, in which
you contest the assertion of those, whom by
way of distinction you are pleased to call the
Burgers. I presume you will readily agree with
me, in regretting the unhappy division of sects
into Burgers and dissenters. A division which
has done irreparable harm to the good
which we were at first harmoniously united, and
which we still protest, and I believe in charity all
of us wish to maintain. A division which has ex-
posed us, with too much reason, to the reproach
and scorn of our common adversaries, having been
a division occasioned by some doctrinal points among
ourselves, about a point which till of late was ne-
ver called in question by the church of England,
and about which we might have entertained dif-
ferent sentiments, without breaking Christian com-
munion and fellowship with one another. But this
is among the other signs and symptoms of God's
anger against us, and against this country, as is
obvious to every attentive observer of his pro-
vidence. With respect to us, the words of the pro-
phet are sadly verified, The Law is broken down,
the word is despised, the commandment is
contemned.
If you had advanced any reason or argument in-
sufficient to convince me, that my leaving the Bur-
gers Church is inconsistent with my principles as a
dissenter, I should have intimated my errors, and
openly retraced them. There is no dishonour in
truly owning our mistakes, once we are convinced
of

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LETTER, &c.

S I R :

I HAVE carefully read over your letter, in which you consider the secession of those, whom by way of distinction you are pleased to call the *Burghers*. I presume you will readily agree with me, in regretting the unhappy division of Seceders into *Burghers* and *Antiburghers* ! A division which has done inexpressible hurt to the good cause in which we were at first harmoniously united, and which we still profess, and, I believe in charity, all of us wish to maintain. A division which hath exposed us, with too much reason, to the reproach and scorn of our common adversaries ; having been a division occasioned by some factious spirits among ourselves, about a point, which 'till of late, was never called in question by the church of *Scotland*, and about which we might have entertained different sentiments, without breaking christian communion and fellowship with one another. But this is among the other signs and symptoms of God's anger against us, and against this guilty land, as is obvious to every attentive observer of his providence : With respect to us, the words of the prophet are sadly verified, *The Lord in his anger hath divided us.*

If you had advanced any reason or argument sufficient to convince me, that my swearing the *Burghers Oath* is inconsistent with my principles as a Seceder, I should have fairly owned my errors, and openly retracted them. There is no dishonour in freely owning our mistakes, once we are convinced

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of

of them. But after the most attentive and impar-
 tial perusal of your performance; I have not observ-
 ed, from the beginning to the end, one solid argu-
 ment against the lawfulness of the Burghs Oath,
 that can produce the least scruple or hesitation in
 the minds of those, who are otherwise clear about
 the matter; far less justify the black and infamous
 characters, under which, in your abundant charity,
 you have represented the *Burghers*, as involved in
 the most awful perjury, as having given up with
 their allegiance to the *King of Zion*, and in a word,
 as deserving the highest censures of the church.
 The same things are repeated over and over again,
 without any proof. Your principles are deduced
 from a few facts, which you strongly assert, and
 would have us receive as true; which nevertheless
 I hope I shall be able to make appear in the sequel
 to be absolutely false and groundless. The only reasons
 you have advanced against the lawfulness of swearing the
 burghs oath, are, as far
 as I can discern, the two following. The one is,
 That by so doing we Homologate and approve all
 the errors and corruptions that presently prevail in
 the church of Scotland; and the other, That the
 swearing the burghs oath, and the renewing our
 covenants, national and solemn league, are utterly
 inconsistent with one another. I shall particularly
 consider the proofs you have adduced in support of
 these two points; and if it shall be made appear,
 that you have failed in the proof of these, it neces-
 sarily follows, that all the cruel invectives you have
 poured out against us, in the end of your letter, as
 most erroneous and scandalous; and all you have
 said in defence of the extravagant and unaccounta-
 ble conduct of yourself and your brethren, in ad-
 venturing to inflict upon us the highest censures,

are



are absolutely groundless; the native fruits of pre-
 judice, uncharitableness, bitterness, and rancour. ¹⁰
 You alledge, that by swearing the burgess
 oaths we homologate and approve all the errors
 and corruptions that prevail in the established
 church. Let us see by what argument you prove
 that point. Why, you tell us, (page 12th) ¹¹ That by
 swearing in the burgess oaths, that we allow with our
 heart, the profession of religion in the established
 church, authorised by the laws of the realm: we
 declare to the world, that our profession of religion
 is one and the same with the profession of religion
 in the church of Scotland. Do you then think that
 because we have one and the same profession of re-
 ligion with the established church, we are to be
 considered as part and part with the corrupt party in
 the establishment, who have, in so many instances,
 acted contrary to their professed principles, and are
 still proceeding from one degree of corruption, unto
 another. This is a consequence I must beg leave
 gladly to deny, as by no means following from the
 premises. I shall readily agree with you (page 10th) ¹² That
 the religion presently professed in this realm, and
 authorised by the laws thereof, cannot possibly be
 construed as referring to any other profession of
 religion, than that which is made by the establish-
 ed church, seeing this is the national profession of
 religion, and there is no other at present authoris-
 ed by the laws of this realm. I also agree to what
 you assert in the same page, ¹³ That it is in the na-
 ture of things quite inconsistent, to maintain a pro-
 fession of religion the very same with that of the e-
 stablished church, and yet to maintain a profession
 of religion different from it: to have a profession of
 religion authorised by the laws of this realm, which
 is the highest and purest of all, and yet to maintain a

a man professes and allows with his whole heart,
 and which he swears to abide fast to his life's end,
 and not withstanding to have another profession of re-
 ligion, which is not authorised by the laws of this re-
 alm, seeing a man cannot have two different profes-
 sions of religion, any more than he can have two
 consciences. This is self evident, and what nobody
 will deny or dispute with you. But in the whole of
 your reasoning you grossly misrepresent the case, and
 proceed upon a supposition that will not be granted
 by you, viz. That the profession of religion made by
 the Seceders is different from the profession of religi-
 on in the established church. This is absolutely false
 in fact, The Seceders maintain the same profession of
 religion with the established church, because they
 adhere to the same standards, the same confession of
 faith, same catechisms, and directory for govern-
 ment and worship. I regret, as much as you can
 do, the errors and corruptions of the establishment,
 of which I am sorry to say, are still increasing; but
 be it is certain on the one hand, that the church of
 Scotland, notwithstanding the errors and corruptions
 that prevail in her, has never as yet adopted a new
 confession of faith, and a new directory; and it is
 certain on the other hand, that the Seceders by de-
 parting from her communion, never meant to give
 up with her doctrine, discipline, government, and
 worship as contained in her standards. This is the
 profession of religion the Seceders still make, and it
 is the same that is made by the established church,
 and authorized by the laws of this realm. The Se-
 ceders complain with too just ground that the pre-
 vailing party in the church of Scotland have been,
 for a course of years, and are still acting contrary
 to those standard principles, which they are solemn-
 ly engaged to maintain, and of which they still
 make

make profession; in this respect we reckon it our duty to bear a testimony against them, and to leave them in their communion. But we have no sort of quarrel with their professed and standard-principles; to these we still adhere, and we hope to abide at and defend them to our life's end. You'll therefore be kind to excuse me, when I express my astonishment at your taking upon you to assert, that the profession of religion made by the seceders is different from that made in the established church. You'll excuse me the rather, when I remind you that you yourself asserted quite the contrary in the first testimony emitted by you and the brethren, when you protested against the sentence of the Commission, the 16th year of *November 1733*. Your words are as follow: *Our secession is not from the church of Scotland: we own her doctrine contained in her confession of faith: we adhere to her covenanted presbyterian church government, discipline and worship; nor is our secession from those who are cleaving unto our covenanted principles, and who are affected with the grievances we complain of, and are in their several spheres wrestling against the same; but it is from a party who have got the management in their hands, and who have got the majority on their side in the judicatories, particularly in our Assemblies and Commissions; and who are carrying on a course of defection from our reformed and covenanted principles, &c.* Here you profess to yourself in the strongest terms, to be of the same religion professed by the church of Scotland, and maintained in her standards. Nay, what is more, you declare yourself in communion with all those, who adhere to the same standards, and that your secession is only from a corrupt party, who are acting contrary unto them. With what confidence you can

can assert after this, that the profession of religion made by the Seceders is not the same with that of the established church, I leave yourself to determine. Every unprejudiced person will easily discern a glaring inconsistency betwixt your first testimony and what you have asserted in your letter. Perhaps you have got a new light since that time, and have seen reason to renounce the standard principles of the church of *Scotland*, of which you once made profession: for this I am not able to account, only I am certain, that all true Seceders still adhere to the same principles, and to those terms upon which the secession was at first stated. Would to God it had still proceeded on the same footing! Its success then had been much greater than it is now, or indeed than can be expected in our present torn and disjointed situation.

But I proceed to consider your other argument against swearing the Burghers Oath; its alleged inconsistency with our renewing our covenants, national and solemn league. You tell us page 15th "That the reformation of the second period is sworn to in our covenants, none will doubt, and it is evident to all, that our covenants and the second period of reformation are buried in the revolution settlement, and are not authorized by the laws of this realm," and to the same purpose, you tell us, (page 10th) "That our covenants, and the second period of reformation, were adopted in the revolution settlement of religion, or belong to the profession made by the established church, and authorized by the laws of this realm, is what none will pretend to say, the contrary being so manifestly the fact." And you have the uncommon assurance to maintain, (page 16th) "That in the revolution settlement, a testimony against prelacy was dropt and

and laid aside, and Presbyterian government was authorised only, as most agreeable to the inclinations of the people; but nothing was owned of its being the only government of Christ's institution in his word. This is the sum and substance of the argument from whence you deduce the inconsistency of swearing the burgess oath, with the renewing of the covenants. — It is a sign of a very bad cause, when the maintainers of it must have recourse to things absolutely false, or misrepresent such as are true. It is absolutely false, that Presbyterian government at the revolution, was authorised only, as agreeable to the inclinations of the people, without notice being taken of its foundation in the word of God, and institution by Jesus Christ. This is sufficiently evident from the preamble of the act of parliament, *June 7th 1690*, ratifying the Confession of Faith, and settling Presbyterian government, which is as follows; "Our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen's Majesties, and three estates of parliament, conceiving it to be their bound duty, after the great deliverance God has lately wrought for this church and kingdom, in the first place, to settle and secure therein, the true Protestant religion, according to the truth of God's word, as it hath of a long time been professed within this land; as also, the government of Christ's church within this nation, agreeable to the word of God, and most conducive to the advancement of piety and godliness, &c." After which, Presbyterian church-government and worship is established, confirmed and ratified. And certainly it must be understood as established, confirmed and ratified, in conformity to the preamble of the act, that is, as agreeable to the word of God, and most conducive to the advancement of true piety and godliness;

to smol yd ingil (p. 8.) Just a m 151 line 10.
ness to explain and express acknowledgments of its
divine institution. If nothing more than this had
been done at the revolution, in favours of Presbyte-
rian government and worship, you could never
have asserted with any truth and justice, that a tes-
timony against prelacy was then dropped and laid
aside. But it is very certain, and, I dare say, you
yourself are conscious, that much more was done
to this purpose. Was not the act, 2 parl. Cha II.
entitled, *An act asserting his majesty's supremacy
over all persons, and in all causes ecclesiastical*, ex-
pressly rescinded, as inconsistent with the establish-
ment of presbyterian church government. Here
was a glorious testimony against prelacy: I may
say it was a striking at its very root. Must not you
yourself know, that in the forecited act of parlia-
ment, *June 7th, 1690*, all acts, statutes, laws, or-
dinances and proclamations made by king James
VI. and Charles II. in favours of prelacy, and con-
trary and prejudicial to, and inconsistent with, and
derogatory from the protestant religion and pres-
byterian government established, were expressly re-
scinded. I appeal to the act itself for the truth of
what I assert. Besides, by an act of the same par-
liament, *April 25th*, the presbyterian ministers, who
had been instrumental in carrying on the glorious
covenanted work of reformation, from 1638 to
1650, and were thrust from their churches since
the 1st of *January 1661*, were restored to their
churches and stipends upon their former relation,
without any new call; by which, all the tyranny
and persecution exercised over them since the re-
stitution, was condemned, and the glorious work
they were engaged in, was in effect homologated
and approved. That there are such acts of parlia-
ment, is undeniable. They have been fully enu-
mera-

merated, and set in a fair and just light by some of the ~~Burgher~~ ^{Burgher} ~~Seceders~~, who have written in opposition to your party; nor is it in your power to give a satisfactory answer to the consequences, that do follow from them; at least, no such answer, as far as I know, has as yet appeared.

From all these laid together, it is evident, that if our covenants and the second period of reformation on are so far from being buried in the revolution or settlement, that they are in effect and by necessary consequence adopted into it, and belong to the profession made by the established church, and authorized by the laws of this realm.

It is true, the parliament, at the revolution, did not appoint the swearing of the covenant; but they did what was equivalent; they abolished Episcopacy, and established Presbytery upon the model of the act 1592; and by this act, the old confession of faith, and covenant were expressly ratified; and farther, it is undeniable, that the parliament in 1643, within that very reforming period, (which you so unjustly assert to be buried in the revolution or settlement) established the church upon the very same act 1592; from whence it follows, that the parliament 1690 settled the church upon the same foundation as it was betwixt 1638 and 1649; and consequently, instead of overlooking and burying that period of reformation, as you affirm, they approved, confirmed and ratified it; and then they did what was much the same as formerly swearing the covenant, they ratified the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and enacted that none should be admitted or continued minister of this church, without first swearing and subscribing the said *Confession of Faith*, and solemnly engaging himself to the maintenance of Presbyterian government and wor-

ship. So that the doctrine, discipline, worship and government of the church of *Scotland*, as contained in our *Confession of Faith* and received standards, is the religion sworn to in the *Burghs Oath*, professed within this realm, and authorised by the laws of this realm. And I leave every unprejudiced person to judge, if our professing and allowing the principles of the Presbyterian church of *Scotland* be any ways inconsistent with our renewing the covenants, national and solemn league, the original and great design of which was the maintenance and advancement of the foresaid principles. These two are so far from being inconsistent, that they are strictly connected, and go hand in hand together.

But here you object, That in the second period of the Reformation, patronages were rescinded, and in this period they are authorised by the laws of the land, and you cannot consistently swear a testimony against patronages, and yet give up with the testimony against it. Here you have forgot, that when the covenants were sworn, and during the greatest part of the second period of reformation, patronages were authorised by the laws of the land. For you know they were not abolished by act of parliament, till 1649; yet our worthy forefathers scrupled not to swear the solemn league and covenant, and why we should scruple to repeat the same engagement, notwithstanding the sanction given to patronages by the laws in being, is more than I can comprehend. Besides, you must excuse me from granting that patronages are any part of the religion presently professed in this realm, notwithstanding they are authorised by law. I regret, as much as you can do, that the church of *Scotland* has given, in her judicial proceedings, so much countenance to settlements by presentations, as

vertheless it is certain, that they have not as yet professed them as a part of their principles. Many members in the church, corrupt as she is, complain of patronages as a grievance and encroachment on their constitution. And it is well known, that the church of Scotland did apply to the legislature for a repeal of that grievous and iniquitous law; by which she disclaimed it as any part of her principles. We are sworn by the Burghs Oath, to the doctrine, discipline, worship and government of the Presbyterian church of Scotland, as contained in her received and approved standards. This is the whole and every part of our profession; and it is the religion presently professed within this realm, and authorised by the revolution parliament, of which patronages are no part; for you know, they were then abolished. If parliaments after this, that were glaringly disaffected to our happy establishment, have enacted patronages; and if a corrupt party in the establishment, have, in contradiction to their professed principles, encouraged and promoted them, this I cannot help; I lament it, and reckon it my duty to testify against it. Yet, in as far as patronages are no part of the professed principles of the church of Scotland, confirmed and ratified by the Revolution, I am not to be considered by swearing the burghs oath, as in any measure bound or engaged to them.

With respect to what you have advanced, concerning the reformation of England, which we are bound, by the solemn league and covenant, to endeavour after, it is easily answered, there is no inconsistency betwixt my swearing to the doctrine, discipline, government and worship of the Presbyterian church of Scotland, as contained in her standards, and authorised by the laws of this realm, and

to endeavour, in my sphere, to promote the said principles in *England*, and every where else, as far as I am able. If the *Scottish* parliament, at the Union, showed not a becoming concern for the establishment of Presbytery in *England*, we are not to be blamed for this. We disapprove and ament it. And though we complain of the countenance given to episcopacy in *Scotland*; yet, it is certain, that Presbyterian doctrine, discipline, government and worship were authorized by law, at the Union, as well as at the Revolution. Nay, the perpetual continuance of them is a fundamental article in the Union of the two kingdoms; so that these are still the religion presently professed in this year 1759, and authorized by the laws of this realm, which we can swear, with all freedom, to abide at and defend, to our life's end.

Thus I have fairly and impartially considered the force of those arguments you have adduced, against the lawfulness of swearing the Burges's Oath; and, from what has been advanced, I think it is evident, that there is nothing wrong in the oath itself; and, that Seceders may swear it, most consistently with their professed principles. In as far as they adhere to the doctrine, discipline, worship and government of the church of *Scotland*, as contained in her received and approved standards, this being the profession of religion presently made in this realm, and authorized by the laws thereof; to which profession the greater part of the establishment have acted, and are still acting contrary, against whom, on that account, we reckon it our duty to bear a testimony, and to leave their communion, 'till they see their defections, and endeavour to be reformed. When matters are considered in this light, we cannot think ourselves chargeable with any inconsistency

fency in our conduct; or that we are presumptu-
 ous in giving out that WE are the *Associate Synod*,
 constituted in a way of Secession from the establish-
 ed church, maintaining a testimony against her and
 all her defections from attained to reformation.
 We are proceeding in the same way in which the
 Seceders at first set out; and in this way, notwith-
 standing all your black aspersions upon our con-
 duct, and your vain threats against us, we expect,
 through divine grace, to be instrumental in main-
 taining the deserted cause of a REDEEMER, and
 in bearing a testimony for HIM, against a sinful and
 perverse generation, who are ashamed of him and
 his words.

The heavy charges you bring in against us, as
 betraying and burying the testimony for truth,
 and seducing others into defection from the right
 path, are entirely founded upon our swearing the
Burgess Oath. This is all you can pretend to say
 against our conduct; and as you have not evinced
 any thing wrong in that oath, or inconsistent with
 our profession as Seceders, all your heavy charges
 necessarily fall to the ground, just as a building falls
 when its foundation is undermined; so that the
 concluding part of your letter needs no answer, as
 the principles whence it is deduced, are apparently
 false and groundless.

I have the charity to think, that you and your
 party mean well; but alas! you have been left of
 God, to fall into the most grievous errors. Your
 whole conduct hitherto discovers a people, whom
 for the present the Lord has deserted. Consider, I
 beseech you, that every difference in judgment is
 not to break Christian fellowship and communion.
 The Burghers could have entertained a good opi-
 nion of those who scrupled the *Burgess Oath*, and
 have

51/ have lived in terms of communion with them, if they had not, in the most antichristian manner, pretended to impose their own mistaken notions upon others, and with a heaven-daring arrogance, they, the inferior number, proceeded to censure the majority, for no other reason but their differing from them.

You and your party have been the unhappy instruments of dividing the Lord's people from one another, and marring, to a great degree, the success of that testimony for a Redeemer's cause and honour, which if it had helped unanimously to maintain, might, through the blessing of the Lord, before this time, have produced the most desirable effects. I trust a gracious God will in his own time open your eyes, and convince you of the error of your ways. I shall add no more, except to recommend to your serious and careful perusal, the words of the apostle, Phil. iii. 15, 16. *Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing you be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.* I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your most obedient

and humble Servant

Aberdeen, July

14th 1759.



J. S.